

## Maria Shriver: Reaping the Rewards of Volunteering

Gandhi once said, “the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” His timeless words resonate today, teaching us important life lessons — lessons rooted in core values of giving back and making a difference.

We ask ourselves how can we encompass such values in our lives and how can we share them with our family, our children and our communities. I’m a big believer that we all can make a difference in our own unique ways, that we all have the ability to serve and a responsibility to give back, to volunteer our time, our creativity and our energy to make our communities and homes a better place for everyone. But the difference we make isn’t just in the lives we touch — it’s through our actions, our compassion and our kindness that we begin to connect with our own lives. We start to learn more about ourselves by focusing less on ourselves, simply by turning our attention to those in need and lending a helping hand.

Elizabeth Marie Lopez, a young woman from San Francisco, grew up not sure of her purpose, potential or place in life, and she yearned for a sense of belonging. And she found it, ultimately, in the heart of service. When Elizabeth joined AmeriCorps, windows of opportunity opened for her and she found her passion to mentor and tutor students. Not only did she inspire those she touched, but in return, found the inspiration she needed in her life. In Gandhi’s words, she found herself by losing

*“My father always said we should break our mirrors and look beyond ourselves and look at the world to see who needs our help.”*



John Decker, Office of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

**First Lady Maria Shriver joined Our City Forest and students of Lee Mathson Middle School (San Jose, Calif.) in a tree-planting exercise for the launch of CaliforniaVolunteers, the nation's largest online, statewide, volunteer-matching network.**

herself in the service of others.

I am incredibly thrilled that today there is an online volunteer matching network at CaliforniaVolunteers.org where people throughout California can experience the pride that goes along with volunteering. This initiative that I launched with CaliforniaVolunteers is the largest statewide volunteer-matching network in the nation, and it makes it easier to find volunteer opportunities in your local area. I realize there are many people who are interested in volunteering or

searching for something more, but just aren’t sure where to begin. By visiting CaliforniaVolunteers.org, Californians can search a database of more than 25,000 opportunities and find one that calls to them.

In California, we are working to make volunteering part of every child’s experience growing up. Many of our schools and community organizations already support service through service-learning and other community service programs. In addition, we have established Cesar E. Chavez afterschool service clubs for

children in Title I middle schools. Students involved in these clubs will learn more about the life and values of Cesar E. Chavez, but will also have the opportunity to discover their own communities and how they can make a positive impact.

In addition, youth in these clubs will be eligible to receive the Governor and First Lady's Service Award, which honors children ages 5 to 14 who complete 25 hours of community service in a 12-month period. We hope these newfound experiences and recognition will inspire them to make volunteering a part of their life.

I'm also a big believer that everyone at every age can serve. And I know it's a struggle to find quality family-time so that's why I encourage families to volunteer together. I learned this lesson at an early age. My parents, Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Sargent Shriver, led by example and taught

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CaliforniaVolunteers

**First Lady Maria Shriver and her daughter Katherine (left) volunteer during a Martin Luther King Day project.**

me and my brothers that we can all make a difference in the lives of others through service. My father always said we should break our mirrors and look beyond ourselves

and look at the world to see who needs our help. And I continue to teach this same lesson to my children today. I often take my children to various service projects in our community. And although they might be skeptical at first, once they get there, they get it and they have a good time.

I encourage everyone to get connected and get involved in their local communities; it can be as simple as cleaning a beach or a park, sharing time with the elderly, delivering food to the hungry or working in a school or community garden. Whatever it is that you choose to do, just realize you can make a difference in the lives of others by giving back, but also know that what you get in return is something much more...

you just might find yourself. ♦

*Maria Shriver is First Lady of California and honorary chair of CaliforniaVolunteers.*

## NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

*A program of the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network*

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